



Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Census's role in the official recognition of Indigenous people

National Reconciliation Week offers people across Australia the opportunity to focus on reconciliation and to explore new and better ways of meeting challenges in our communities. The Census of Population and Housing plays an important role in this reconciliation process.

Before the referendum of 1967, the Australian Constitution stated: "In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted."

While the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, the forerunner to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), tried to count all residents of Australia - those people who stated they were more than "half Aboriginal" were excluded from the published results.

Following the 1967 referendum, where over 90 per cent of Australians voted to repeal clauses in the Constitution excluding Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were included in official Census counts for the first time.

Reconciliation Australia Co-Chair Jackie Huggins said the 1967 referendum was seen by many people as the start of the reconciliation process. "The overwhelming vote in favour of Indigenous citizenship showed what we can achieve when Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work side by side," said Ms Huggins.

"Not only is it right for Indigenous people to be counted in the census, it is also very important so that other Australians have information about our presence in different parts of the country.

"Census figures are used to help with the allocation of funding for things like housing, education, health and community services. Community organisations and councils use Census information for funding applications and for making decisions about the provision of services."

According to the Head of Census, Paul Williams, "The identification of Indigenous people is a far more complex issue than merely finding and counting them. Recent Censuses (1996 and 2001) revealed large, unexpected increases in the number of Indigenous people counted. This was largely due to an increase in people identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in the Census.

"For example, in the 2001 Census, more than 400,000 people identified themselves as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin, up 16% since the 1996 Census. 4% of this increase was due primarily to people who had not previously identified as Indigenous in the 1996 Census, identifying as Indigenous in the 2001 Census" he said.

At each Census the ABS aims for a full and accurate count of everyone in Australia on Census Night. To achieve this it is important for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be counted.

The next Census will be held on Tuesday night, 8th August.

For more information about Reconciliation Week go to the website of Reconciliation Australia www.reconciliation.org.au

COUNTING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) have been working hard to make sure that all Australians including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are successfully counted in an appropriate way.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live in urban, regional and rural areas. Some people also live in more remote and traditional settings. ABS understands that because every community is different the job of collecting information needs to be different in some areas.

A tailored enumeration (counting) strategy has been developed in nominated areas where the Indigenous populations are relatively isolated from cities and rural towns.

In these communities, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be employed to collect information. An interviewer form has been designed to make it easier for this information to be collected.

Other collection strategies have also been developed where groups of Indigenous people live in, or close to, towns or cities. In these areas local Indigenous Assistants will be available to explain the Census or help people fill in their forms.

The ABS is always looking to improve. 2001 Census procedures in Indigenous communities were observed by the Centre for Aboriginal and Policy Research (CAEPR). Many of the recommendations made from these observational studies have been adopted for the 2006 Census. These observations will take place again in 2006 to help the ABS evaluate this Census.

Uses and benefits of the Census

The information collected through the Census can benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a range of ways.

The information assists in identifying communities and their needs, planning for future services and the allocation of funding in areas as diverse as housing, education, health, environment, transport, roads, employment and community services.

Government, non-government and community organisations, such as Co-ops, Land and Community Councils use Census information for planning and funding applications.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All information collected on the Census form is strictly confidential. All Census workers are legally bound never to release anyone's personal information.

Organisations like Centrelink, Housing, Community Services, Tax Office and any other agency can never obtain personal information from the Census.

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